

Message Text

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44

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FEA-02 SCI-06 AGR-20 OPIC-12 DRC-01 /168 W

----- 071127

R 090942Z SEP 74

FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4191

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 4026

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, BG, IN, PK

SUBJ: MEETING WITH SHEIKY MUJIB

1. AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN AND I CALLED ON PRIMIN SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN IN THE EARLY EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 7 FOR WHAT PROVED TO BE A PLEASANT MEETING BUT NOT ONE THAT COVERED MUCH NEW GROUND. YOWEVER, I DID HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAY, IN RESPONSE TO THE PRIMIN'S REITERATED CONCERN ABOUT THE FOOD SITUATION IN BANGLDESH AS A RESULT OF THE FLOODS, THAT WE ARE SEEKING WAYS TO BE HELPFUL, PARTICULARLY ON FOOD, IN THE IMMEDIATELY UPCOMING MONTHS.

2. WHEN AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY MENTIONING HIS AWARENESS OF THE DAMAGE WHICH BANGLADESH HAD SUFFERED AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT FLOODS, THE PRIMIN USED THE OCCASION TO REHEARSE NOW FAMILIAR THEMES. MUCH WAS MADE OF THE INIQUITOUS BEHAVIOR OF THE PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT IN THE YEARS BETWEEN 1947 AND 1971 DURING WHICH TIME THE DREDGING OF THE RIVERS WAS ABANDONED; SHEIKH MUJIB ADDED THAT THE GOP HAD FOCUSED ALL OF ITS ATTENTION ON THE INDUS PROJECTS, IGNORING EAST BENGAL'S NEED FOR ADEQUATE CONTROL OF RIVERS AND DISREGARDING THE IMPACT OF

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FARAKKA BARRAGE.

3. THE PRIMIN THEN TURNED TO BANGLADESH'S PRESENT ECONOMIC PLIGHT, HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPACT OF THE OIL CRISIS ON BANGLADESH'S EFFORTS TO REBUILD ITSELF AFTER THE DEVASTATION OF THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE. IN THIS SETTING, THE FLOODS SIMPLY ADDED AN ENORMOUS BURDEN, FORCING BANGLADESH TO CURTAIL IMPORTS EVEN MORE STRINGENTLY. AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN MENTIONED THAT HE HAD LEARNED EARLIER IN THE DAY OF THE PROPOSED ASHUGANJ FERTILIZER PLANT, AND WAS EXTREMELY IMPRESSED BY THE FACT THAT ITS CAPACITY WOULD NOT ONLY CONTRIBUTE VERY SUBSTANTIALLY TO BANGLADESH'S FERTILIZER NEEDS BUT COULD WELL OFFER SOUND POSSIBILITIES FOR EXPORTS. SHEIKH MUJIB ACKNOWLEDGED THE BENEFITS WHICH ASHUGANJ WOULD CONFER ON BANGLADESH BUT ADDED THAT FINANCING WAS A SEVERE PROBLEM.

4. I TOOK THIS OPPORTUNITY TO NOTE OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT ALL SITE PREPARATION WORK HAS TO BE COMPLETED IN THE FORTHCOMING DRY SEASON OR ELSE A FULL YEAR WILL BE LOST. I EXPLAINED THE BACKGROUND OF OUR CONCERN THAT SITE PREPARATION MIGHT BE DEFERRED, AND I EXPRESSED OUR HOPE THAT THIS WOULD NOT BE THE CASE. MUJIB REPLIED THAT HE IS FULLY AWARE OF THE ADVANTAGES WHICH WOULD FLOW FROM A PROMPT START BUT ADDED THAT, AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE RECENT FLOODS, HE MUST FIRST FIND THE MONEY FOR THE PURCHASE OF FOODGRAINS AND SEED. (WE HAVE LEARNED SINCE THE MEETING THAT THE PRIMIN SUBSEQUENTLY ASKED HIS STAFF ECONOMIC ADVISER TO LOOK INTO THIS QUESTION AND REPORT BACK TO HIM.)

5. IN THE CLOSING MINUTES OF THE CONVERSATION, THE PRIMIN DWELT ON THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HIS 32 MONTHS IN OFFICE, EMPHASIZING THAT HE HAD BEEN FORCED TO BUILD A NEW GOVERNMENT FROM SCRATCH. HIS MESSAGE SEEMED TO BE THAT, WHEN WE THOUGHT ABOUT BANGLADESH'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND SHORTCOMINGS, WE SHOULD NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE FACT THE EXISTENCE OF A GOING POLITICAL CONCERN IS ITSELF A SIZABLE ACCOMPLISHMENT.

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